



# U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

## Swaziland

### International Religious Freedom Report 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

There are no formal constitutional provisions for freedom of religion; however, the Government generally respects freedom of religion in practice, although authorities on occasion disrupted or cancelled prayer meetings that they believed to have political implications. A draft constitution, expected to be adopted in 2005, would make Christianity the country's official religion; however, it also would include a provision that individuals have a right to "freedom of thought, conscience, or religion."

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of approximately 6,700 square miles and its population is an estimated 1.1 million. Christianity is the dominant religion. Zionism, a blend of Christianity and indigenous ancestral worship, is the predominant religion in rural areas. A large Roman Catholic presence, including churches, schools, and other infrastructure, continues to flourish. The population is approximately 35 percent Protestant, 30 percent Zionist, 25 percent Roman Catholic, and 1 percent Muslim. The remaining 9 percent of the population is divided among the Anglican Church, the Methodist Church, the Baha'i Faith, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Judaism, and other religious groups. Followers of Islam and the Baha'i Faith generally are located in urban areas. There are few atheists.

Missionaries inspired much of the country's early development and still play a role in rural development. Missionaries mostly are western Christians, including Baptists, Mormons, evangelical groups, and other Christian faiths. The Baha'i Faith is one of the most active non-Christian groups in the country.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### Legal/Policy Framework

Currently, there are no formal constitutional provisions for freedom of religion; however, the Government generally respects freedom of religion in practice, although authorities on occasion disrupted or cancelled prayer meetings that were considered to have political implications. Article 24 of the draft constitution, expected to be adopted in 2005, states that individuals have a right to "freedom of thought, conscience, or religion." Swaziland has not had a constitution since 1973. Religious and other civil society groups have frequently denounced the drafting process for allowing input only from individuals and not from groups.

All religions are recognized unofficially. There is no law describing the organizational requirements of a religious group. However, new religious groups or churches are expected to register with the Government upon organizing. To be considered organized, a religious group must demonstrate possession of either substantial cash reserves or financial support from foreign religious groups with established ties to western or eastern religions. For indigenous religious groups, authorities consider demonstration of a proper building, a pastor or religious leader, and a congregation as sufficient to grant organized status. These organized religious groups are exempt from paying taxes, although they are not considered tax-deductible charities.

Portions of the capital city are zoned specifically for places of worship of all denominations. Government permission is required for the construction of new religious buildings in urban areas, and permission is required from chiefs in rural areas. Those religious groups that wish to construct new buildings may purchase a plot of land and apply for the required building permits. The Government has not restricted any religion with financial means from building a place of worship; however, non-Christian groups

sometimes experience minor delays in obtaining permits from the Government to build residences for clergy.

While the Government primarily observes only certain Christian holidays, the monarchy (and by extension the Government) supports many religious activities. The Royal Family occasionally attends various evangelical programs and makes concerted efforts to attend the national Good Friday and Ascension worship services at the national stadium in the Ezulwini Valley, both of which are hosted by participating churches of the local evangelical movement. During the period covered by this report, King Mswati III used the Good Friday service to reiterate his support of Christianity as the country's main religion. The King occasionally has hosted events at his primary residence for ministers of the evangelical movement.

The Government neither restricts nor formally promotes interfaith dialogue, and it does not provide formal mechanisms for religions to reconcile differences. Religious groups have access to the courts as private entities.

### **Restrictions on Religious Freedom**

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Followers of all religious faiths generally are free to worship without government interference or restriction, although there are exceptions.

Authorities on occasion disrupted or cancelled prayer meetings that were considered to have political implications. On October 16, 2004, police and security forces disrupted a prayer vigil held by local residents commemorating the four-year anniversary of the Macetjeni/KaMkhweli evictions. Residents of KaMkhweli and Macetjeni were evicted in 2000 for refusing to transfer their allegiance from their traditional chiefs to Prince Maguga, a brother of the King.

Officials sometimes discriminated against members of Jehovah's Witnesses. On September 2, 2004, three primary school children who are Jehovah's Witnesses were expelled from school in Lomahasha for refusing to pray during school assemblies. During the period covered by this report, the press reported that local chiefs threatened to evict members of Jehovah's Witnesses because they refused to dress in traditional mourning wear or refused to wear tassels identifying virgins. Non-Christian groups sometimes experienced minor delays in obtaining residence and building permits from the Government.

The government-owned television and radio stations do not permit non-Christian religions to broadcast messages. Christian programming is available on both of the parastatal broadcast outlets, Swazi Broadcasting and Information Service and Swazi Television. The local satellite television service, DSTV (cable service is not available), carries at least one religious channel. Church groups owned several newsletters and magazines.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

### **Forced Religious Conversion**

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

### **Abuses by Terrorist Organizations**

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

## **Section III. Societal Attitudes**

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. For example, five different denominations peacefully maintain adjoining properties in Mbabane. There was no public conflict among faiths during the period covered by this report.

Christian churches are well organized and are divided into three groups: The Council of Churches, the League of Churches, and the Conference of Churches. Each group is open to members of all denominations. However, Zionists and all African traditional churches belong to the League of Churches; most evangelical churches associate with the Conference of Churches; and Anglican, Roman Catholic, United Christian, Mennonite, Episcopal, and Methodist churches generally belong to the Council of Churches. These groups primarily produce common statements on political issues, facilitate the sharing of radio production facilities, or become involved with common rural development and missionary strategies. Although the groups sometimes strongly disagree with one another, they have found common ground on issues of concern such as support for a constitutional amendment to allow for freedom of religion.

During the period covered by this report, several very conservative clergymen urged the Government to declare the country uniquely Christian.

## **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy maintains contact and good relations with the various religious organizations.

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